



University of Groningen

Teacher strategies to support the social participation of students with SEBD in the regular classroom

de Leeuw, R.R.; de Boer, A.A.; Bijstra, J.; Minnaert, A.E.M.G.

Published in:
European Journal of Special Needs Education

DOI:
[10.1080/08856257.2017.1334433](https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1334433)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2018

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

de Leeuw, R. R., de Boer, A. A., Bijstra, J., & Minnaert, A. E. M. G. (2018). Teacher strategies to support the social participation of students with SEBD in the regular classroom. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 33(3), 412-426. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1334433>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.



Teacher strategies to support the social participation of students with SEBD in the regular classroom

R. R. de Leeuw, A. A. de Boer, J. Bijstra & A. E. M. G. Minnaert

To cite this article: R. R. de Leeuw, A. A. de Boer, J. Bijstra & A. E. M. G. Minnaert (2018) Teacher strategies to support the social participation of students with SEBD in the regular classroom, European Journal of Special Needs Education, 33:3, 412-426, DOI: 10.1080/08856257.2017.1334433

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1334433>



© 2017 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 05 Jun 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1785



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Teacher strategies to support the social participation of students with SEBD in the regular classroom

R. R. de Leeuw^a, A. A. de Boer^a, J. Bijstra^b and A. E. M. G. Minnaert^a

^aSpecial Needs Education and Youth Care, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands; ^bRegional Expertise Centre for Northern Netherlands Cluster 4 – Behaviour, Groningen, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

It is known that schoolteachers have difficulties supporting students with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) in inclusive classroom settings. Despite the literature providing strategies for schoolteachers, little is known about strategy use in daily practice to influence the social participation of students with SEBD, and whether different strategies are used for students with different types of SEBD. Accordingly, the aim of this study was twofold: (1) to identify which strategies are suggested by primary schoolteachers as influencing the social participation of students with SEBD in the inclusive classroom; and (2) to investigate whether primary schoolteachers suggest different strategies for students with internalising and externalising behavioural difficulties. Qualitative data were collected through focus group meetings with Dutch primary schoolteachers ($N = 41$) and analysed with a multi-grounded theory approach. This resulted in a conceptual model demonstrating that the participants not only suggest strategies primarily focused on supporting social participation, but also suggest pre-conditional strategies, despite the differences between internalising and externalising behavioural difficulties in terms of characteristics and needs. The results are discussed in light of further investigation for schoolteacher support to meet the specific academic and social needs of all students, with or without SEBD.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 13 February 2017
Accepted 18 May 2017

KEYWORDS

Internalising and externalising behavioural difficulties; primary schoolteachers; inclusive education

Introduction

As a result of the trend for inclusive education, a broad diversity of students are educated in regular classrooms. One of the reasons for including students with special educational needs (SEN) in regular education stems from the belief that attending special education leads to segregation from the community and decreases the opportunities for social inclusion, whereas regular education is expected to lead to social inclusion (Fisher, Roach, and Frey 2002). The Netherlands is following the inclusive education trend and implemented the act '*Wet Passend Onderwijs*' (Appropriate Education Act; a law for inclusive education) in

CONTACT R. R. de Leeuw  r.r.de.leeuw@rug.nl

© 2017 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

August 2014. As a consequence, schools in the Netherlands are required, to provide educational support to students with all types of disabilities (Wet passend onderwijs 2012). A student is only referred to segregated special education if the academic and social needs of a student cannot be met. The changes in the Dutch education policies stem from international policies, such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994), which clearly specifies that 'those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs (VIII)'. Translated into the daily school practice, this means that schoolteachers need to facilitate the inclusion of all students and meet their academic and social needs.

An important effort in the implementation of inclusive education was encouraging the social inclusion of students with different kinds of disabilities who were previously educated at different schools (UNESCO 1994; UNCRPD 2006). It was reasoned that social inclusion would be promoted by removing physical barriers and encouraging opportunities for interaction and cooperation between students with and without SEN (Koster et al. 2009; Pijl, Frostad, and Flem 2008). This reasoning is in line with achieving successful social inclusion as described by Farrell (2000). He states that in order to establish social inclusion, students with SEN need to be included fully, by taking full and active part in the life of the mainstream school and that students should be seen as valued members of the school community. This means that all students, regardless of their needs, need to be socially accepted and participating fully in their school and classes. However, social inclusion is not simply realised by eliminating physical barriers, such as segregated schools (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou 2011; Pijl, Frostad, and Flem 2008; Swain, Nordness, and Leader-Janssen 2012).

For social inclusion, in the classroom, it is necessary to be part of the class as a participant. Based on the literature review of Koster et al. (2009), the following four main aspects are identified as part of the definition of social participation: friendship, interaction, social self-perception and acceptance by classmates. This definition indicates that social participation is optimal when a student has a few friends, positive social contacts and interactions with other classmates, and a sense of belonging (Koster et al. 2009).

Positive social participation is of great importance to students' development, regardless their SEN. Positive social participation leads to a sense of belonging and better academic performance (Bierman 2004; Blum and Libbey 2004). Difficulties in social participation can lead to negative effects in both the short and the long term, such as mental, behavioural, and social development problems, and feelings of depression (Bagwell, Newcomb, and Bukowski 1998; Baumeister and Leary 1995; Bierman 2004; Newcomb, Bukowski, and Pattee 1993; Parker and Asher 1993). Additionally, students with a negative social participation are at greater risk of contact with criminality (Kauffman and Landrum 2012).

Studies of the social participation of students with SEN in the inclusive classroom indicate that 15–25% of these students experience difficulties with social participation (De Boer 2012; Newcomb, Bukowski, and Pattee 1993; Pijl, Frostad, and Flem 2008; Ruijs, Peetsma, and van der Veen 2010). Students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) are particularly likely to experience difficulties in their social participation in the regular classroom (Falkmer et al. 2012; Schwab et al. 2015). Students with SEBD have fewer friendships (Avramidis 2013), experience more loneliness (Bossaert et al. 2012) and are less accepted in comparison with their typically developing peers (Schwab et al. 2015). The following description is widely used when referring to students with SEBD 'a student who exhibits difficulties in the effective regulation of their social interactions, behaviour and/or emotional

functioning that interferes with the students' own development and/or lives of others' (Cooper 2011; Cooper and Cefai 2013; Kauffman and Landrum 2012). The behavioural difficulties of students are mostly divided in two categories, namely internalising (e.g. withdrawal, anxiety and depression) and externalising (e.g. aggression, impulsivity and hyperactivity) behavioural difficulties. The internalising and externalising behavioural difficulties are less socially desirable (Kauffman and Landrum 2012) and could therefore negatively influence the opportunities for a positive social participation (Avramidis 2010).

The effect of the schoolteacher on the students' social participation should not be overlooked (Cooper 2011; Cooper and Cefai 2013; De Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert 2011; Poulou 2005). Indeed, schoolteachers are the first persons observing difficulties in social participation. However, Evans, Harden, and Thomas (2004) concluded in their review study, about schoolteacher strategies, that none of the reviewed studies focused on enhancing the social participation of students with SEBD. Most training programs and interventions are focused on how to react to the students' disruptive behaviour or how students with SEBD can be supported with their academic problems and under achievement (Almog and Shechtman 2007; Brophy and McCaslin 1992; Cooper 2011; Derriks et al. 2002; Elliott et al. 1985; Evans, Harden, and Thomas 2004; Spilt and Koomen 2009; Van der Wolf and Van Beukering 2009; Westling 2010) and are not focused on promoting students' social participation. Despite the substantial amount of literature and interventions designed to support schoolteachers on educating students with SEBD (Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan 2010; Maag 2006; Quinn et al. 1999) and a positive self-efficacy towards educating students with SEBD (e.g. Smeets, Ledoux, and Lous 2015), research has indicated that schoolteachers struggle with students with SEBD in the regular classroom (Goei and Kleijnen 2009; Westling 2010).

If schoolteachers do address social participation of students with SEBD, differentiation is necessary given the differences in characteristics and needs of students with internalising and externalising behavioural difficulties (Kauffman and Landrum 2012; Mooij and Smeets 2009). A few studies have found distinct patterns in teacher strategies per type of SEBD (Brophy and McCaslin 1992; Cooper 2011; Van der Wolf and Van Beukering 2009). The findings of these studies are in line with the reasoning that students with different types of SEBD would not benefit from 'one-size-fits-all' approaches. However, this difference in strategy use for internalising and externalising behavioural difficulties is rarely found in other studies (Maag 2006; Mooij and Smeets 2009; Schoenfeld and Janney 2008). Regarding the differences between the characteristics and needs of students with internalising and externalising difficulties, we expect that a one-size-fits-all approach would not be suitable for both internalising and externalising behavioural difficulties.

In summary, students with SEBD experience difficulties with the social participation in the regular classroom situations. Primary schoolteachers can play an important role in influencing the social participation of their students. The literature provides strategies and interventions to support the primary schoolteacher. However, these strategies and interventions are focused on educational adaptations, such as classroom and behaviour management, or are focused on controlling the disruptive behaviour of students with SEBD. These interventions often neglect the opportunity to improve the social participation of students with SEBD. It is unclear which strategies primary schoolteachers use in their daily practice, and if strategies are used, whether primary schoolteachers use a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to address the social participation of students with internalising or externalising behavioural difficulties together, or different strategies which take the students' different characteristics

and needs into account. The aim of this study is to gain greater insight into primary schoolteachers' strategy use by answering the following two research questions:

- (1) Which strategies do regular primary schoolteachers suggest to influence the social participation of students with SEBD?
- (2) Do primary schoolteachers suggest different strategies to promote the social participation of students with internalising and externalising behavioural difficulties?

Method

Design

A qualitative study was conducted to answer the research questions. Data for this study were collected using focus group meetings with Dutch primary schoolteachers. Focus groups are used as a qualitative research method to collect data created by group dynamics, because it is expected that the focus groups will provide richer data than individual interviews or questionnaires (Bazeley 2013). We expect that the subconscious knowledge of the participants will be addressed during the discussions of the group (Wang, Su, and Hsieh 2011). For the analyses of the qualitative data a multi-grounded theory approach was used (Goldkuhl and Cronholm 2010). This approach is an extension of grounded theory and allows us to combine deductive and inductive coding (Goldkuhl and Cronholm 2010). This means that existing theory, such as the concepts of social participation, can be taken into account and include data that cannot be coded based on existing theory.

Regarding the inductive coding, the strategies provided by the focus groups were systematically and via iteration coded by the first two authors ('the researchers') (Charmaz 2011). During the coding process, the first author carried out all the coding, in regular contact with the second author.

Participants

Seven focus groups were included in this study. The meetings with these groups were held in the period January to May 2015. The size of the focus groups varied from 3 to 10 participants. All the panels were guided by a moderator (the first two authors or an instructed colleague).

The following inclusion criteria were used to select the participants for the focus groups:

- The participant works at a (regular) primary school;
- The participant has experience of teaching students with SEBD in a regular education setting.

A total of 41 participants participated in the focus groups. At the time of data collection, most participants ($N = 38$) were reading for Master's degree in applied science. One participant was reading for a Master's degree in Educational Sciences and two participants had already completed their Master's degrees in SEN. See Table 1 for the demographics of the participants.

Procedure of focus group meetings

The participants were asked to prepare a real-life case. This case had to be based on one of their own students, who experienced specific difficulties in the social participation and were stated as having, or at risk of a psychiatric of SEBD. Based on the participants' input, two cases (one of a student with internalising behavioural difficulties and one of a student with externalising behavioural difficulties) were selected per focus group by the moderator based on best fit for the inclusion criteria that a case should be about the social participation problems and about classroom management or questions related to coping advices for the behavioural difficulties of the case.

At the beginning and during the focus group meetings, the participants were informed or reminded that the focus of the study and the meeting was on gaining greater insights into what primary schoolteachers do to influence the social participation of students with SEBD.

During the focus group meetings each contributor explained his or her case. The case was then discussed according to the incident method principles (Milus, Oost, and Holleman 2006). This method is often used in tutor groups to establish a group recommendation for the contributor (i.e. the participant presenting a case). The incident method consists of four phases: (1) information phase, (2) situation analysis phase, (3) decision phase, and (4) discussion phase. The participants were asked to formulate recommendations to the contributor throughout the decision phase. All the participants, including the contributor, were asked to write their strategies and recommendations on post-it notes before sharing these with the group. These post-it notes were collected, whereas these strategies and recommendations are the principal part of the data collection.

The participants were asked to permit the recording of the sessions using a voice-recorder. Through this it was possible to capture any strategies which were formulated during the discussions in one of the other phases. One focus group did not give permission for this. As a consequence of this, the moderator of that focus group took extra notes. The first author listened carefully to the recordings from the other focus groups, which resulted in a few additional strategies.

Coding procedure and analysis

The first step in the data preparation was to digitalise all the strategies formulated during the focus group meetings and remove strategies which were overly case-specific or which covered the same content and could be regarded as duplicates.

Regarding the multi-grounded theory, the four concepts from the definition of social participation (Koster et al. 2009) were sensitised to code the strategies mentioned (see Table 2). These sensitised concepts were used to code the strategies based on concepts

Table 1. Demographics of participants.

Demographics	Primary schoolteachers (N=41)
Gender	Male (N=4) Female (N=37)
Age	22–55 years (M=34.32)
Teaching experience	1–30 years (M=9.8)

Table 2. Sensitised concepts of social participation.

Theme	Subtheme	Description of theme or subtheme
Friendships and relationships		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aiming to encourage friendships in the classroom. These strategies can be initiated by the schoolteacher, classmate or the student
Contacts and interaction	Playing together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aiming to encourage playing together (inside and/or outside) with one or more classmates
	Working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aiming to encourage collaboration in academic tasks with classmates
Acceptance by classmates		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aiming to improve the social position/acceptance of the pupil in the group (with the classmates)
Social self-perception	Behavioural assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aiming to evaluate and adjust the personal behaviour of the student by the schoolteacher, classmates or the students themselves
	Coaching and reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aiming at coaching of the student by the schoolteacher in which social interaction and its effects are the central subjects

drawn from existing terminology, but staying close to the meaning and content of the data itself (Flick 2014). The sensitised concepts were slightly adjusted to be in line with the wording of the participants. The strategies which could not be coded using the sensitised concept were coded line-by-line (*in vivo*) to ensure that no data would be excluded (Corbin and Strauss 2014). These remaining strategies were coded via the phases of open coding and axial coding. Open coding means that the data are broken down into codes which are closely related to the original data, while at the axial coding phase the data and codes are combined into underlying relationships (Flick 2014). The Cohen's Kappa was calculated before the axial coding phase begun, to control for the inter-rater reliability. The first research question could be answered based on this procedure.

To answer the second research question, the researchers went back to the original strategies and counted the number of times a main code was allocated to a strategy mentioned by the participants in relation to either the internalising or the externalising case. To test whether there were differences in the proportion of codes between the two types of behaviour difficulties, a two-proportions analyses was conducted. We used an alpha level of .10 to determine whether the difference was significant.

Results

Results of the coding process

A total of 286 strategies were formulated during the focus group meetings. After data preparation, 244 strategies remained, as 42 strategies were too case-specific or covered the same content. The researchers had an inter-rater reliability of 95% ($k = .92$) at the end of the open coding phase. The slight difference in the coding could be explained by the fact that one of the researchers had used multiple codes for a single strategy, whereas the other researcher had coded all those strategies with a single code. After discussing the outcomes the researchers agreed to allow the multiple coding.

After this agreement, the axial coding phase was begun. The clustered strategies were rephrased into a main strategy with a description which functions as a definition, resulting in 44 main strategies.

Strategies suggested by teachers

The results show that the primary schoolteachers suggested a wide range of strategies (see Table 2). For example, the participants mentioned that they would try to improve the students' social skills through via correcting or praising the students or teaching a lesson which specifically focused on how to play and work together. Moreover, the participants indicated that they would discuss the student in their team and that positive parent contact is needed.

Based on an in-depth analyses of the strategies mentioned, the researchers concluded during the axial coding phase that two main categories could be defined, namely pre-conditional strategies and social participation strategies. The 44 strategies could be divided between these two categories, with the pre-conditional strategies being those which did not seem to influence social participation directly and were more focused on improving general school situations (e.g. 'teaching the student to use headphones when it is too noisy in the classroom' or 'designing an educational plan which involves the parents setting joint goals'), while the social participation strategies are focused on influencing aspects of social participation as defined in this study (e.g. 'introducing a peer buddy system' or 'initiating group plays').

The participants indicated that both direct and indirect strategies are very import to establish better social positions for students with SEBD. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model 'Teacher Strategies for Social Participation' (TS-SP) including both categories of strategies (Table 3).

Differences in strategies suggested for internalising and externalising behaviour difficulties

To analyse whether the strategies for internalising and externalising cases were mentioned with differing frequency, the 44 main codes were counted against the original 244 strategies. As mentioned in the methods section, the raw data were used for this analysis (see Table 4).

The results show that there are hardly any differences in the number of times different social participation strategies were suggested for students with internalising and externalising behaviour difficulties. There were more differences for the pre-conditional strategies. There were a few significant differences found for some strategies, namely 'seeking support' (e.g. 'asking support with my colleagues') ($p = .061$), 'stimulating desirable behaviour' (e.g. 'sustaining a positive teacher-student relationship', 'correcting the undesired behaviour to desired behaviour') ($p = .051$), and 'professionalization' (e.g. 'looking up information on the Internet') ($p = .076$).

Conclusion and discussion

The aims of this study were to gain greater insight into primary schoolteachers' strategy use for influencing the social participation of students with SEBD and to analyse whether different strategies were suggested for students with internalising and externalising behaviour

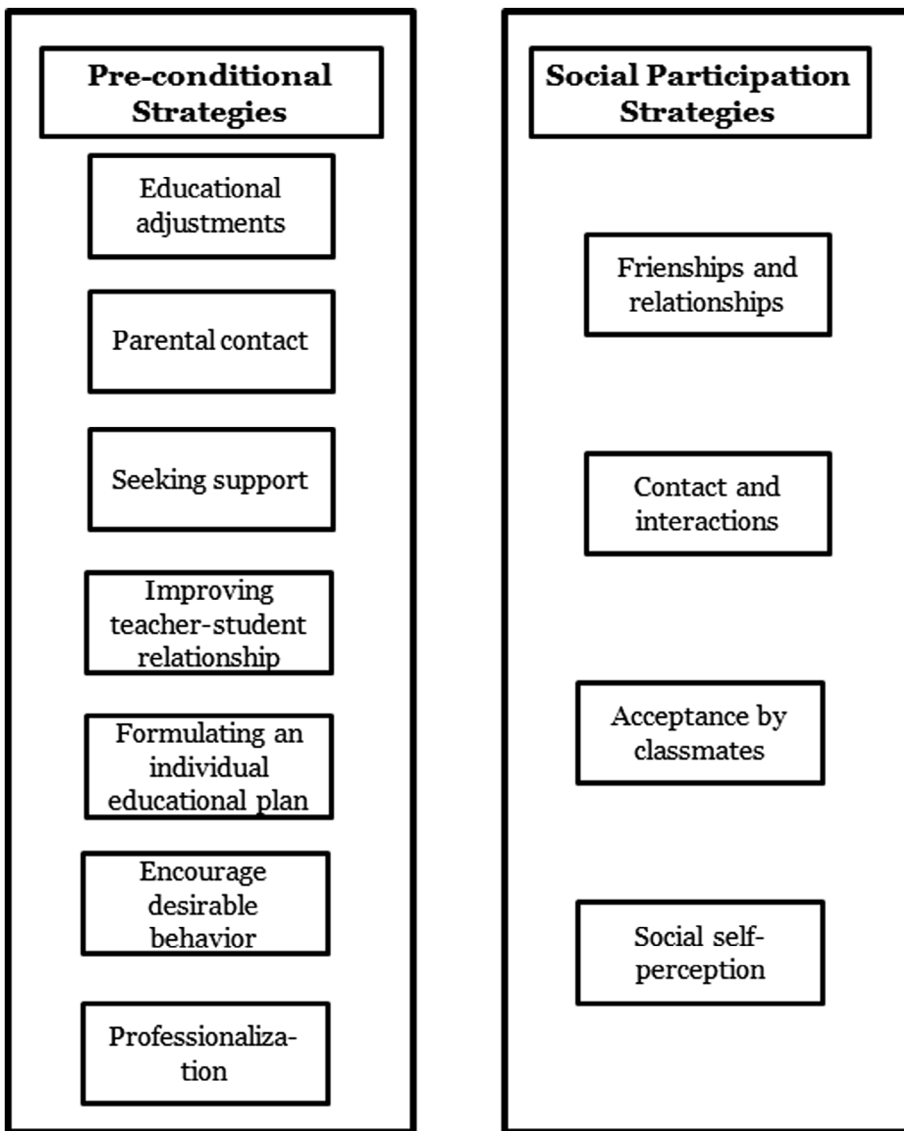


Figure 1. Conceptual model: 'Teacher Strategies for Social Participation'.

difficulties. Regarding the study's first aim, the results showed that the participants suggested a broad variety of strategies. These strategies were focused on influencing social participation direct and indirectly. The researchers categorised the indirect strategies under the umbrella term 'pre-conditional strategies', including strategies such as parental contact and whole-school support. The direct strategies were categorised under the term 'social participation strategies' and include strategies such as peer buddy systems and classroom goals during structured playtime. Based on these outcomes we can conclude that while the primary schoolteachers were asked to focus on naming strategies which encourage social participation directly, they approached social participation in the classroom as a broader concept. This resulted in strategies suggested which are not directly focused on social participation

Table 3. Summary overview of the coding procedure with examples of the strategies.

Category	Theme and subthemes	Examples of strategies
Pre-conditional strategies	Educational adaptations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjustments in learning • Offering structure 	• Visualising the daily classroom structure with pictograms
	Parental contact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting parents involved • Collaborating with parents (focusing on problem solving) • External support at home 	• Setting up an individual education plan together with parents
	Seeking support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support by colleagues • Support by head teacher/school board • External support 	• Diagnostic research on psychological, behavioural and linguistic skills
	Improving teacher–student relationship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreasing students dependency • Improve teacher–student involvement • Decreasing teacher–student conflicts 	• Try to gain the student’s trust
	Formulating an individual educational plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observing behaviour • Assessment • Investigation of students’ needs 	• Make concrete agreements about the number of times that a student can approach the teacher
	Stimulating desirable behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consequences of undesirable behaviour • Correcting behaviour • Neglecting behaviour • Positive approach 	• Time out
Pre-conditional strategies	Professionalisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent study • Teacher coaching 	• Observing the interactions between student and teacher
Social Participation strategies	Friendships and relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • n.a. 	• Create play situations in the playground, with clear (game) rules
	Contacts and interactions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play together • Work together 	• Peer tutoring
	Acceptance by classmates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • n.a. 	• Formulate a classroom goal that all students should be included in a game
	Social self-perception <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of behaviour • Student coaching and reflection 	• Start a conversation with the student about his/her own behaviour (and its effect)

^aIt turned out during the coding process that it was not possible to formulate subthemes for two themes.

but which they, as primary schoolteachers, felt are important. Regarding the study’s second aim, there were no significant differences between the cases with internalising and externalising behaviour difficulties in how commonly particular social participation strategies were mentioned. However, the ‘professionalization’ theme emerged strongly for the

Table 4. Frequency count of the main strategies on raw data ($N_{strategies} = 244$).

		Frequency		
		Externalising cases	Internalising cases	Z-score
Pre-conditional	Educational adaptations	21	18	.40
	Parental contact	11	19	-1.62
	Seeking support	13	23	-1.87**
	Improving teacher–student relationship	15	11	.73
	Formulating an individual educational plan	14	14	-.09
	Stimulating desirable behaviour	29	16	1.95**
	Professionalization	0	3	-1.77**
Social participation	Friendships and relationships	1	1	-.02
	Contacts and interactions	24	20	0.52
	Acceptance by classmates	26	22	.49
	Social self-perception	26	27	-.28
Total count ^a		180	174	

^aBecause the researchers could use multiple codes per strategy, the total count exceeds the number of strategies (244).

** $p < .10$.

pre-conditional strategies, and the themes ‘seeking support’ and ‘stimulating desirable behaviour’ differed strongly between the cases with internalising and externalising behavioural difficulties. We can conclude based on these outcomes that the participants tended to suggest a one-size-fits-all approach when directly addressing the social participation of students with SEBD.

We aimed in this study to gain greater insight into the strategies used by primary schoolteachers in inclusive classrooms to influence the social participation of students with SEBD. It turned out that the participants not only provided strategies directly related to influencing social participation, but also suggested strategies which influence social participation more indirectly. This result seems to accord with various meta-analyses of teachers’ strategies in the inclusive classroom (Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan 2010; Evans, Harden, and Thomas 2004; Maag 2006; Quinn et al. 1999). Only the review of Cooper (2011) and the teacher strategy studies of Brophy and McCaslin (1992) and Van der Wolf and Van Beukering (2009) explicitly mention teacher’ strategies which also focus on influencing social participation. Although it is alarming that primary schoolteachers had difficulties in specifying strategies directly related to social participation, it is important to realise that indirect strategies are also valuable to teachers. This result suggests that the pre-conditions of social participation should also be met, perhaps even before primary schoolteachers consider influencing the students’ social participation.

Analysing the strategies used in internalising and externalising cases, respectively, reveals that teachers adopt a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to encouraging social participation. We found this finding remarkable, whereas we expected to find different approaches to address the social participation for students with internalising and externalising behavioural difficulties based on the different characteristics and needs of students with internalising and externalising behavioural difficulties (Kauffman and Landrum 2012; Mooij and Smeets 2009). These differences would require primary schoolteachers to use different kind of approaches.

Multiple explanations could be provided for the one-size-fits-all approach that emerged from the data. Firstly, it could be questioned if the distinction between internalising and externalising behavioural difficulties is always clear. For example, a student with anxiety

problems could apply externalising coping behaviours such as screaming, when a situation is causing over stimulation. Secondly, the participants had difficulties in formulating and mentioning different and clear strategies regarding the behaviour difficulties. We found it remarkable that the participants in this study did not suggest more different and in-depth strategies for internalising and externalising behaviour difficulties, whereas the participant sample consisted of teachers almost all of whom had a postgraduate degree. Therefore, our participant sample could be regarded as not representative of the 'general' population of primary schoolteachers in the Netherlands and a limitation of this study. A postgraduate degree is not required in the Netherlands. Yet, the Dutch government encourages primary schoolteachers to earn their postgraduate degree to increase their professional development and competence (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap 2011). Recent data ($N_{\text{primary school teachers}} = 2107$) show that 18.1% of the current primary schoolteachers have a postgraduate degree (Berndsen et al. 2014). The fact that even primary schoolteachers with a postgraduate degree have difficulties formulating strategies is striking. We assumed that these teachers would have greater knowledge and therefore more skills to cope with the demands to educate students with SEBD. Our study indicates that even primary schoolteachers with a postgraduate degree still struggle to translate the theoretical knowledge into practice in order to cope with the needs and differences of socially excluded students with SEBD in the regular classroom. This finding that primary schoolteachers struggle to cope with students with SEBD in the regular classroom is also found in more general studies about teaching in inclusive education (Goei and Kleijnen 2009; Swain, Nordness, and Leader-Janssen 2012). Thirdly, the 'one-size-fits-all' approach could be a consequence of the lack of details in the mentioned strategies. The strategies that were removed from the sample were strategies formulated in a case-specific manner, for instance with the case where a student not wanting to eat ice-cream during a school trip escalated, resulting in severe externalising behavioural difficulties during that trip. The remaining 244 strategies were formulated in terms such as 'talk with the student about how to make contact with classmates'. This is a strategy which could be recommended for students with internalising or externalising behavioural difficulties, and the content of such conversations would be completely different. We expected that strategies like these would be formulated with additional case and content-specific details, regarding the internalising and externalising behavioural difficulties and the characteristics of the cases.

We did expect that the participants would have difficulties reconciling the strategies that they had used. Therefore we had carefully thought about the study design and choose to have focus group meetings as research method. In this set-up the participants are stimulated to explore their tacit knowledge and go into detailed information, which would have been omitted had we used questionnaires. Tacit knowledge is based on individual expertise, intuition, understanding and professional insight (Gourlay 2002; Wang, Su, and Hsieh 2011). This kind of knowledge is difficult to describe and reconcile, because it is subconscious knowledge (Wang, Su, and Hsieh 2011). However, it turned out that even when we tried to encourage the participants' tacit knowledge, via discussions with the other primary schoolteachers, the participants still had difficulties formulating detailed strategies that influence students' social participation.

Another remark regarding the research design is that this study only provides insights into the teachers' account. This implies that the mentioned strategies could differ from the strategies that primary schoolteachers would actually use in real-life classroom situations.

In the study by Almog and Shechtman (2007) the teacher's strategies in hypothetical situations was compared to the actual strategies that primary schoolteachers used in the classroom. This study revealed a gap between what primary schoolteachers suggest as the best strategy in a hypothetical classroom situation and what they do in comparable real-life classroom situations. Based on this study we surmise that teachers provide different strategies for hypothetical and actual classroom situations. It is therefore strongly recommended that future research would use data triangulation, such as observing teachers in their daily practice to determine which strategies they apply, if any, in real-life classroom situations and confirm the teachers' account of their strategies.

In addition to the remarks on the specific population in our sample and the research design, we should note that the sample size of seven focus groups ($N_{\text{teachers}} = 41$) could be interpreted as too small for general advices for primary schoolteachers. However, the participants reported that the list of strategies, generated in this study, provided additional stepping stones for themselves and colleague's to address the social participation of students with and without SEBD.

The results of this study raise questions about the classroom situation of general primary schoolteachers. It is questionable whether teachers actually use a one-size-fits-all approach to encourage the social participation of students with SEBD. Future research should address this question, because this approach is insufficient enough to meet the different academic and especially the social needs of students with SEBD. In order to improve the difficulties that students with SEBD often experience regarding social participation, it is important to support primary schoolteachers in their daily practice. Gaining knowledge about effective strategies and teachers' use of these strategies in daily practice presents itself as a next step for future research.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Dutch Foundation for Children's Stamps (*Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland*) for funding this research project. We also would like to thank our colleagues who helped out as moderators during the focus group meetings.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland, [grant number 8508165].

Notes on contributors

Renske de Leeuw, is a PhD candidate at the Department Special Educational Needs and Youth Care at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Her research interests include practices in inclusive education, with particular focus on teacher and teaching strategies influencing the social inclusion and participation of students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in regular education.

Anke de Boer, is an assistant professor at the Department Special Needs Education and Youth Care at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Her research interests include inclusive education, with particular focus on social participation, the influence of directly involved, and interventions and strategies to improve the social participation of students with disabilities in regular education.

Jan Bijstra, is a doctor in Developmental Psychology. Presently, he is working as a researcher at the Regional Expertise Centre for Northern Netherlands (RENN4) in the Netherlands. He is particularly interested in the socio-emotional development of students with special educational needs as well as in the effects of intervention programmes on these students.

Alexander Minnaert, is a full professor at the Departments of Special Needs Education, Youth Care and Clinical Educational Sciences at the University of Groningen, The Netherlands. He received his PhD in School, Educational and Medical Psychology from the University of Leuven, Belgium. His research interests are focused upon motivation, emotion, self-regulation, learning (disabilities), special needs education and inclusive education.

References

- Almog, O., and Z. Shechtman. 2007. "Teachers' Democratic and Efficacy Beliefs and Styles of Coping with Behavioural Problems of Pupils with Special Needs." *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 22 (2): 115–129.
- Armstrong, D., A. C. Armstrong, and I. Spandagou. 2011. "Inclusion: By Choice or by Chance?" *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 15 (1): 29–39.
- Avramidis, E. 2010. "Social Relationships of Pupils with Special Educational Needs in the Mainstream Primary Class: Peer Group Membership and Peer-assessed Social Behaviour." *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 25 (4): 413–429.
- Avramidis, E. 2013. "Self-concept, Social Position and Social Participation of Pupils with SEN in Mainstream Primary Schools." *Research Papers in Education* 28 (4): 421–442.
- Bagwell, C. L., A. F. Newcomb, and W. M. Bukowski. 1998. "Preadolescent Friendship and Peer Rejection as Predictors of Adult Adjustment." *Child Development* 69 (1): 140–153.
- Baumeister, R. F., and M. R. Leary. 1995. "The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation." *Psychological Bulletin* 117 (3): 497–529.
- Bazeley, P. 2013. *Qualitative Data Analysis: Practical Strategies*. London: Sage.
- Berndsen, F. E. M., J. L. J. M. Brekelmans, B. Dekker, and C. T. A. Van Bergen. 2014. *Onderwijs Werkt! Rapportage van een Enquête onder Docenten en Management uit het po, vo, mbo en hbo. Meting 2013* [Education Works! Report Based on a Teacher and Management Survey in Primary and Secondary Education. Measurement 2013] (No. 2270). Amsterdam: Regioplan.
- Bierman, K. L. 2004. *Peer Rejection: Developmental Processes and Intervention Strategies*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Blum, R. F., and H. P. Libbey. 2004. "Executive Summary." *Journal of School Health* 74 (7): 231–232.
- Bossaert, G., H. Colpin, S. J. Pijl, and K. Petry. 2012. "Loneliness among Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Seventh Grade." *Research in Developmental Disabilities* 33 (6): 1888–1897.
- Brophy, J., and M. McCaslin. 1992. "Teachers' Reports of How They Perceive and Cope with Problem Students." *The Elementary School Journal* 93 (1): 3–68.
- Charmaz, K. 2011. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Cooper, P. 2011. "Teacher Strategies for Effective Intervention with Students Presenting Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties: An International Review." *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 26 (1): 71–86.
- Cooper, P., and C. Cefai. 2013. "Evidence-based Approaches to Social, Emotional and Behavior Difficulties in Schools." *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy* 10 (3): 81–101.
- Corbin, J., and A. Strauss. 2014. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. 4th ed. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- De Boer, A. 2012. *Inclusion: A Question of Attitudes?: A Study on Those Directly Involved in the Primary Education of Students with Special Educational Needs and Their Social Participation*. Groningen: Stichting Kinderstudies.

- De Boer, A., S. J. Pijl, and A. E. M. G. Minnaert. 2011. "Regular Primary Schoolteachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education: A Review of the Literature." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 15 (3): 331–353.
- Derriks, M., G. Ledoux, M. Overmaat, and E. Van Eck. 2002. *Omgaan met Verschillen. Competenties van Leerkrachten en Schoolleiders* [Dealing with Differences. Competencies of Teachers and School Leaders]. Amsterdam: SCO-Kohnstamm Instituut.
- Durlak, J. A., R. P. Weissberg, and M. Pachan. 2010. "A Meta-analysis of After-school Programs That Seek to Promote Personal and Social Skills in Children and Adolescents." *American Journal Community Psychology* 45 (3–4): 294–309.
- Elliott, S. N., J. C. Witt, G. A. Galvin, and R. Peterson. 1985. "Acceptability of Positive and Reductive Behavioral Interventions: Factors That Influence Teachers' Decisions." *Journal of School Psychology* 22 (4): 353–360.
- Evans, J., A. Harden, and J. Thomas. 2004. "What Are Effective Strategies to Support Pupils with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) in Mainstream Primary Schools? Findings from a Systematic Review of Research." *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* 4 (1): 2–16.
- Falkmer, M., M. Granlund, C. Nilholm, and T. Falkmer. 2012. "From My Perspective – Perceived Participation in Mainstream Schools in Students with Autism Spectrum Conditions." *Developmental Neurorehabilitation* 15 (3): 191–201.
- Farrell, P. 2000. "The Impact of Research on Developments in Inclusive Education." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 4 (2): 153–162.
- Fisher, D., V. Roach, and N. Frey. 2002. "Examining the General Programmatic Benefits of Inclusive Schools." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 6 (1): 63–78.
- Flick, U. 2014. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. 4th ed. London: Sage.
- Goei, S., and R. Kleijnen. 2009. *Eindrapportage Literatuurstudie Onderwijsraad 'Omgang met Zorgleerlingen met Gedragsproblemen'* [Final Report Study of Literature by the Education Council 'Coping with Students with EBD']. Zwolle: Windesheim.
- Goldkuhl, G., and S. Cronholm. 2010. "Adding Theoretical Grounding to Grounded Theory: Toward Multi-grounded Theory." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 9 (2): 187–205.
- Gourlay, S. 2002. "Tacit Knowledge, Tacit Knowing, or Behaving?" <http://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/2293/1/Gourlay%202002%20tacit%20knowledge.pdf>.
- Kauffman, J. M., and T. J. Landrum. 2012. *Characteristics of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders of Children and Youth* 10th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Koster, M., H. Nakken, S. J. Pijl, and E. van Houten. 2009. "Being Part of the Peer Group: A Literature Study Focusing on the Social Dimension of Inclusion in Education." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 13 (2): 117–140.
- Maag, J. W. 2006. "Social Skills Training for Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: A Review of Reviews." *Behavioral Disorders* 32 (1): 5–17.
- Milus, J., H. Oost, and W. Holleman. 2006. *Werkvorm: Incidentmethode* [Work Plan: Incident Method]. <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/13638>.
- Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap. 2011. *Actieplan leraar 2020* [Teacher Plan of Action 2020]. Den Haag: Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap.
- Mooij, T., and E. Smeets. 2009. "Towards Systemic Support of Pupils with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 13 (6): 597–616.
- Newcomb, A. F., W. M. Bukowski, and L. Pattee. 1993. "Children's Peer Relations: A Meta-analytic Review of Popular, Rejected, Neglected, Controversial, and Average Sociometric Status." *Psychological Bulletin* 113 (1): 99–128.
- Parker, J. G., and S. R. Asher. 1993. "Friendship and Friendship Quality in Middle Childhood: Links with Peer Group Acceptance and Feelings of Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction." *Developmental Psychology* 29 (4): 611.
- Pijl, S. J., P. Frostad, and A. Flem. 2008. "The Social Position of Pupils with Special Needs in Regular Schools." *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 52 (4): 387–405.
- Poulou, M. 2005. "The Prevention of Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties in Schools: Teachers' Suggestions." *Educational Psychology in Practice* 21 (1): 37–52.

- Quinn, M. M., K. A. Kavale, S. R. Mathur, R. B. Rutherford, and S. R. Forness. 1999. "A Meta-analysis of Social Skill Interventions for Students with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders." *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders* 7 (1): 54–64.
- Ruijs, N., T. Peetsma, and I. van der Veen. 2010. "The Presence of Several Students with Special Educational Needs in Inclusive Education and the Functioning of Students with Special Educational Needs." *Educational Review* 62 (1): 1–37.
- Schoenfeld, N. A., and D. M. Janney. 2008. "Identification and Treatment of Anxiety in Students with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders: A Review of the Literature." *Education and Treatment of Children* 31 (4): 583–610.
- Schwab, S., M. Gebhardt, M. Krammer, and B. Gasteiger-Klicpera. 2015. "Linking Self-rated Social Inclusion to Social Behaviour. An Empirical Study of Students with and without Special Education Needs in Secondary Schools." *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 30 (1): 1–14.
- Smeets, E., G. Ledoux, A. Regtvoort, C. Felix, and A. M. Lous. 2015. *Passende Competenties Voor Passend Onderwijs. Onderzoek Naar Competenties in Het Basisonderwijs* [Fitting Competencies for Appropriate Education. Research in Competencies in Primary Education]. Nijmegen: ITS.
- Spilt, J. L., and H. M. Koomen. 2009. "Widening the View on Teacher-child Relationships: Teachers' Narratives concerning Disruptive versus Nondisruptive Children." *School Psychology Review* 38 (1): 86–101.
- Swain, K. D., P. D. Nordness, and E. M. Leader-Janssen. 2012. "Changes in Preservice Teacher Attitudes toward Inclusion." *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth* 56 (2): 75–81.
- UNCRPD (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability). 2006. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol*. New York: United Nations.
- UNESCO. 1994. *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Van der Wolf, K., and T. Van Beukering. 2009. *Gedragproblemen in Scholen: Het Denken en Handelen van Leraren: Intuïtie, Theorie en Reflectie* [Behavioural Problems in Schools: The Thinking and Acting of Teachers: Intuition, Theory and Reflection]. 1st ed. Leuven: Acco.
- Wang, T., C. Su, and T. Hsieh. 2011. "Accumulating and Visualising Tacit Knowledge of Teachers on Educational Assessments." *Computers and Education* 57 (4): 2212–2223.
- Westling, D. L. 2010. "Teachers and Challenging Behavior Knowledge, Views, and Practices." *Remedial and Special Education* 31 (1): 48–63.
- Wet passend onderwijs*, 533. 2012. Dutch Appropriate Education Act. <http://www.passendonderwijs.nl/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Wet-passend-onderwijs.pdf>.